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WHAT TO DO WITH CIVILIZATION IT IS IGNORANT, VULGAR — TEACH, CULTIVATE IT

A SERMON
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What to do with Civilization.

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Being the third of a series of six sermons which seek to set forth the present status and needs of civilization as viewed by six sets of counselors.

"It is Impossible—Get Rid of It."
"It is Bad—Moralize It."
"It is Ignorant, Vulgar—Teach, Cultivate It."
"It is Ugly—Beautify It."
"It is Poor—Materialize It."
"It is Material—Spiritualize It."

What to do with Civilization.

It is Ignorant, Vulgar—Teach, Cultivate It.

WE HAVE listened to those who advise us that our civilization is impossible and urge us to get out from under it. A second group think it worth keeping if it can be moralized. There is a moral order for man which is imperative. Civilization's only hope of getting better is in keeping this law.

A third group see something else. It is not hopeless or bad; it does not know. They see the vulgarity and the ignorance of the world. "My people have gone into captivity for lack of knowledge. And all vision is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed; and the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he saith, I am not learned." Wisdom is the principal thing; understanding will promote us; give length of days, riches, honor, pleasantness, peace, grace and glory. "Wisdom is strength to the wise, more than ten rulers. Yea, wisdom is better than weapons of war." It is a cure for the erring in spirit and they that murmur.

This counsel is not new. The Jewish people thought that knowledge had something to do with civilization. They held up three things: righteousness, knowledge and useful occupation. Ignorance to them was a disgrace; learning the crowning honor. "An ignorant man cannot be truly pious; the more knowledge of the law, the more life," says Hillel.

In a world of war and conquest they lifted up the wise man and the quiet processes of thought for distinction. In a world in which learning was confined to the inner circle, the priesthood, they set up a standard for great and humble alike: all must be perpetual seekers after knowledge. The Jewish people had the first educated laymen. This standard for men got lost and ignorance became a virtue; was the rule. Knowledge was for those who dealt with the mysteries of God.

Then came the Jewish people into Spain, reviving this love of learning; shaming the ignorance of the church; opening up long-sealed sources of knowledge and kindling all Europe, the Renaissance. The book was translated and printed and men read again of this people who insisted that all men must be taught. And from the book came the Puritan and from the Puritan came our national traditions insisting that learning is a safeguard of civilization. The public school was established in the foundation. So vital did it seem to the very life of the nation, that it could not be left to individual choice, preference or caprice. All must know; it must be demanded of all and provided by the state. It is a fundamental American conception that the hope of the whole enterprise rests here. "Promote institutions for the diffusion of general knowledge, enlighten public opinion," said Washington in his farewell address.

Those who say that the trouble is a moral one invited us to look at London where the results of civilization may be seen at close range within small compass. The thing that impresses those most to

whom we now listen is not the people's morals, but their minds. They see not the badness of men but their mental poverty. Sir Thomas More had observed this and believed it a real source of trouble. In the better civilization of Utopia all men are set free for the things of the mind.

The name with which we connect this emphasis in our modern world is Matthew Arnold. Son of a great educator, child of a house and circle of cultivated people, poet, critic, as he was, he went out, as many of the most cultivated have done, to look upon the world about him. He was concerned and wanted to help. He heard the talk about him; read the reports of national achievement. He noted the things always mentioned to show the civilization of his country. He found a firm belief in machinery, railroads, coal, population, as the sure marks that civilization is on its way. He turned from these reports to the people, believing that the state of the people must be most indicative of any civilization. He reports that he found an upper class materialized, which he called the Philistines; a middle class vulgarized and a lower class, the populace, brutalized.

The matter seems rather simple today to those who would cure the materialism of an upper class and the vulgarism of a middle class—just get rid of both. Whether Matthew Arnold had anything worth trying or not, he did try to see things steadily and see them whole. He saw all the people together; saw something wrong in them all. This at once disposes us in his favor. To see all the people together is the mark of a first-class mind and a first-class heart. It

was no surface diagnosis that he made; no quick cure that he proposed. It was a bold proposal that he made; not quite so bold then as it would be today. Blowing up civilization or burning it down would bring forth less criticism now than the thing he proposed. It needs, he said, he dared use the word—culture. It needs more cultivated people in it; needs more sweetness and light. Matthew Arnold put sweetness and light into our vocabulary.

The critics caught the word and that was enough. Culture for the ills of civilization seemed to them like spraying rose water on the Slough of Despond; culture suggested bookish people and dead languages. It suggested dainty, dressed-up people with a peculiar accent; people who observe the social code; visit by card and have dinner at night.

He had to describe more fully this remedy which he proposed. He explained that culture is the love and study of perfection, not in machinery or mining coal, but in people. It is just fineness of human life; making intelligent people more intelligent; making reason and the will of God prevail. There are certain very desirable things which go with real culture: love for neighbor; the impulse to act, be helpful and beneficent; remove error and clear confusion; diminish misery and leave the world better than we found it. Culture's great passion is for sweetness and light. Men have it now but it is imperfect and must continue to be until "the raw and unkindled masses of humanity" are touched with sweetness and light. It must be for all; all must heed, "Be ye perfect," if the world is to be affected. He says that

there are rare moments for humanity as for the single man, flowering times for literature, art and all the creative powers of genius. Then thought is alive and glowing; society is in ferment, responsive to beauty, intelligent and alive. It must be real culture, not prepared intellectual food which creeds and parties are anxious to give for their ends. True culture reaches out but not down. It goes to inferior classes with nothing less than the best, the same for all. It wants all men to live in the atmosphere of sweetness and light.

Here is a diagnosis which says that the trouble is deep-seated and long standing. Here is a long course of treatment submitted. Those who think the trouble is only a skin disease will not be impressed. Those with great faith in their miraculous salve, once applied externally, are not impressed with the old family physician who says, "We must build up the whole system from within, out, and this will take a long time."

As a people we have not used the words, culture, sweetness and light, but it is traditional with us to believe that our welfare is in some way connected with knowledge; that ignorance is in some way an enemy of civilization. The public school is an American institution. There have been times and peoples that thought civilization secure and at its goal when a gun is placed in the hands of every man. Others have thought the desired end is reached when each holds a carving chisel or a brush to make beautiful things. Others have thought the goal is the maximum of leisure to sit under the trees with folded

hands. Our American conception was established back in a world dealing with stern reality. It says that the man for civilization has a gun in his hands for defense, an ax for necessity, books for instruction and a volume for holy guidance. It is a deep seated conviction with us that every man ought to hold a book and be able to read it. We still judge our states and give them rank on the basis of illiteracy. Schools must be established not only as a privilege but as a necessity. Political prudence alone requires it. The school, says this American faith, has power to transform men in a generation into material for the American ideal, liberty for each under law made by all.

Whether right or wrong it is thoroughly American for men, casting about for the best use of accumulated earnings, to choose the planting of libraries all over the land as the most far-reaching contribution. As a church we have been an incarnation of this American belief that books and knowledge are among the first of civilizing forces. In many places this has been our first work, to make a collection of books which grew into a library for all without price. We have thought that companionship with great books does something to a few people at least, and they help stiffen up the morale of the whole place. As a result of the recent study of the state of civilization in the country communities in Ohio, it is reported by good witnesses that the morale has broken down. The same report reveals the fact that about two million people in the state are without access to a library. Ohio as a state was settled with churches more interested in soul insurance than mental cultivation.

These statistics are not lost upon us with our theory of the effect of knowledge on sweetness, light and community morale.

If we hesitate today it is not because we are uncertain about what is needed. This diagnosis seems to us today fundamental, and the way out proposed, authoritative and final. It seems obvious that civilization can get better only as far as it is furnished with more fineness of life, more cultivated men, for its structure and its ends. If we pause it is because we are asking if we are producing what we need and seek. Are our schools, colleges and libraries making for this necessary man, the cultivated man, for sweetness and light? These institutions have been thought of as committed primarily to making fine feeling for fine things, the cultivated man in the best sense. With changing material and emphasis, with the new demands being made upon schools, colleges and libraries, are they making for this man of more sweetness and light? These institutions, with some religious affiliation until our time, have been thought of as implanting the stern moralities with cultivation. Our libraries have been thought of as making accessible the literature which, made known, will produce the same results. Are these institutions doing these things now?

In a small way we had observed that knowledge does not always produce this kind of man needed. We had observed that instructed men sometimes go out to do their nefarious business with finesse because they are instructed. We had observed that well instructed men to teach a school, edit a paper, run a

bank, or do artistic things can be recruited in almost any state or federal penitentiary. We had not been impressed with what instruction and instructed men, divorced from a proper end, may do to the world. We have pause now because we have seen a people to whom the whole world went to school, not only gave the facts, but how to teach them, direct instruction not to make men of fine feeling, but tool-using animals for making things, destructive things. We have seen the end established, a mighty state, with only such individual fineness of life permitted as consistent with the imperial state. Only the minimum amount of sweetness and light could be permitted when the hour struck for the main enterprise toward which all knowledge was directed. When individual fineness of life that feels and loves the decencies, humanities and refinements, when this ceases to be the end of schools, faculties and books, we say now, because we have seen it, that these very things upon which we have depended for our cultivation can waste us and leave us in desolation. We have pause now not because we doubt that civilization needs instruction, but because we are asking if we are not doing the same thing. Are we directing instruction to the same end, productive rather than cultivated men? Are the mechanical things, the technical things, the hand-made, marketable things being established as the proper end rather than fine feeling and individual insight? Are we making the understanding heart and do we conceive that we ought to make it? Or are we more concerned with the skillful hand and the

clever mind? With the example before us in our world we may well ask it and take stock.

Instruction, just instruction, we see now, is no guarantee for our present civilization or assurance of something better. The miry place in Pilgrim's road had twenty thousand cart-loads of instruction dumped into it without mending it. Instruction, schools, universities and books may produce a cunning, sharp-witted, resourceful being who has to be watched; who cannot be trusted with our million hugh power; with whom we cannot live, a being a thousand times more dangerous than the untutored savage. An instructed, bookish barbarian is with us a concrete probability. It is easy for us to conceive that this may be the result of instruction. Knowledge, faculties and libraries may easily with us lose sight of their proper business, making people of fine feeling, discrimination and insight, and direct themselves to some theory of production, or property, or the state, or brute survival; direct themselves to making rebel, lawless people with whom we cannot live in sweetness and light or make a better civilization.

Those who would moralize alone get a good man up to his light, but without very much light. He does the best that he knows but he does not know very much. Good men who keep the moral law but are without knowledge, put them all together and they do not make a good civilization. Or put instructed men together who are not moralized; know much but do not know how to do the right or desire it, and they do not make a good civilization. But do both

to the same man, to each man and to all men; get men who know their universe and conform to its moral order; put these men together and they will make a better civilization.

As we go out to have some part we shall be met by many short cuts and quick remedies. Moralizing people, we shall be told, is very old and out-of-date. That is what they held way back in Dickens' time and before. Instructing and cultivating people, we shall be informed, was what they held way back in Matthew Arnold's time. The short-cut methods had not been discovered then. Proposals such as this will be offered: "Do not concern yourselves with moralizing or instructing men. These are but by-products of mechanical processes, which, perfected, will give such morality and knowledge as fit this kind of world. Get together; organize; take the title of property and move it over there, or put it in the state, for the state is the hope of civilization. Give to all, the franchise, more wages, authority and leisure; these are the things that lift civilization."

In single men, in families and in groups we have seen all of these conditions fulfilled, yet we are not impressed with the results or convinced that we should like to live in a world such as all these put together would make. Most of these conditions, property in abundance, wards of the state, leisure, are fulfilled in the remaining western tribes, and yet, put together, we should not apply the words, goal of civilization. The only material that the better structure can be made out of is a certain kind of man. Far from those being out of date who seek to make

such people, they are just the ones who have gone down to the real foundation of the thing. They are the only people who are dealing with the fundamentals that really matter. Banding men together; changing the title; increasing the power of the state; wages, hours, leisure to think and play, the franchise, even schools, books, libraries and inventions, these have bearing on a better civilization only in so far as they contribute to the real business, making men of integrity and understanding. These are all instruments, means to one end: cultivating, refining and humanizing men.